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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study, conducted as part of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance Project, was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty at a private professional graduate school of their involvement in governance in relation to an ideal system of shared authority and involvement. Data were collected using a survey instrument that contained 10 categorical response questions including the characteristics of an ideal governance process and beliefs about current faculty roles in institutional governance. Twenty-seven usable responses, which represented a 90 percent response rate, were received. Results showed that respondents agreed with four key statements: (1) faculty should assist in clarifying administrator roles; (2) faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities for appropriate governance roles; (3) faculty should be more involved in developing budget expenditures; and (4) the faculty voice is a valuable component in decision making. Responding faculty also perceived the ideal governance process as a system where they were involved early in the decision-making process and were empowered to question policy through a formal process. Two tables summarize response data. (Contains 13 references.) (CH)

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Shared Authority in Professional Education Governance:

Roles and Desires of Full-Time Faculty

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"Shared Authority in Professional Education Governance: Roles and Desires of Faculty"

Abstract

Professional education colleges and universities have taken a leadership role in defining many of the current trends and issues facing all of higher education. Seen as leaders in tuition pricing, fund raising, planning, and career preparation and placement, these institutions have grown increasingly commonplace, and professional education administrators now confront a wider array of administrative- and governance-related issues. This study examined the perceived current roles of full-time faculty involvement in governance as well as what professional education faculty believe to be an ideal governance process. Utilizing a leading professional college as a case study, data indicated some dissatisfaction with reward structures and a call for greater faculty empowerment in policy decisions.

All sectors of higher education have faced increased scrutiny in recent years, particularly those offering professional education. Colleges and universities have come to be viewed with some suspicion, and the decline in public confidence of the last two decades has yet to fade entirely (Murphy, 1991). The result is increased pressure on higher education administrators, particularly those in private professional education where student tuition dollars comprise the majority of revenue are vital to maintain operating funds, to embrace the human and political skills necessary to build consensus for decisions which have long term impacts. Further, as the majority of professional schools are enrollment-driven, efforts must be taken by administrators to develop consensus among the various institutional stake-holders. Thus, it is important that administrators in professional education settings pay close attention to the role of shared governance as evidenced in other venues of higher education.

Shared authority in higher education has consistently been addressed by educational associations (American Association of University Professors, 1971) and recently has been recognized as an area for increased scholarly attention (Gilmour, 1991A; 1991B). Although these efforts have revealed something about the perceptions of faculty investments in governance (Miller, McCormack, & Newman, in press), an ideal model for faculty involvement in decision-making has yet to be examined.

Coupled with the importance of shared authority is the increasing growth and reliance on private professional graduate education institutions. These colleges, which range from law and medicine to chiropractic and nursing colleges, comprise one of the fastest growing and most accountable sectors in the higher education community. For these institutions to continue in their growth and leadership role, shared authority should be studied in greater detail. The purpose for conducting the current study was to examine the perceptions of full-time faculty from a private professional graduate college in relation to an ideal system of shared authority and involvement in institutional governance processes. The study was purposely limited to full-time faculty due to the dramatic variations in the use of adjunct and part-time faculty among professional education institutions, and the need for administrators to build consensus among faculty who have a long-term stake in the institution.

Through a greater understanding of the perceived ideal structure of faculty involvement in governance, structures may be proposed which would best suit administrative and faculty goals. The more effective management of professional higher education may also result in the modelling needed to make shared authority a possibility in mass higher education. Finally, stronger participation by faculty in governance activities may result in a system of transition for faculty to move more effectively into administrative positions.

Shared Authority on Campus

Higher education institutions have historically and consistently claimed some form of faculty involvement in governance (Bergman, 1991). The rise in the bureaucratic structures and increased specialization of administrative positions led to something of a refocusing for faculty participation, namely resulting in senates, councils, and other representative democracy bodies (Bing & Dye, 1992). Miller, McCormack, and Newman (1995) compared these democracies to the civic structures, where administrators serve in an executive capacity, faculty serve as legislators, and trustees serve in a judicial oversight capacity. Trow (1991) commented that these bodies have not served as conduits for developing administrators, but have served as mechanisms for effectively speaking out on curricular matters.

Miller and Seagren (1993) hypothesized that senates and councils were valuable additions to effective higher education management, but increases in participation were necessary to strengthen the collective voice of faculty. Gilmour's (1991A) landmark study which revealed over 90% of all colleges and universities as having some form of senate or council, claimed that governance bodies are effective in providing recommendations to administrators related to policy decisions. McCormack (1995) questioned this strength, contending that distrust between faculty and administrators was a barrier to effective participation in governance. McCormack's work echoed that of

Miller and Seagren's which generally found tenuous faculty-administrator relationships.

The ability of faculty to be involved in the governance process has been considered by some to be an issue without a legal foundation. Miles (1987) described Connick v. Meyer and Knight v. Minnesota as providing the legal framework for restricting all decision making to administrative personnel. According to both federal and state precedent, faculty have no legal right to involvement in the decision making or governance process. Ironically, it is this practice of involving faculty and developing consensus that increases morale, develops a sense of institutional culture and community, improves work motivation, and creates support for administrative actions (Chronister, 1991; Gilmour, 1991A; 1991B; Murphy, 1991; Miller, McCormack, & Newman, 1995).

Within the framework of professional education, little attention has been focused on consensus development. This may partially be due to the use of adjunct and part-time faculty, however, these individuals are typically not involved in campus decision-making and despite their expertise, play little role in developing institutional or accrediting standards. Collaboration in decision-making and policy formation among full-time faculty provides the benefits and faith in administration which will allow continued growth and leadership by private professional education in the future. These administrative and faculty leaders, their behaviors, and their organizations must be

examined in greater depth to fully understand the climate and potential culture for collaborative decision-making.

Methods

The current study was conducted as a part of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance Project, an intensive three-year investigation into the faculty member's role in shared authority in higher education. The project was coordinated by the University of Alabama and included the participation of thirty different colleges and universities from across the United States.

The focus on professional education institutions included the participation of an urban college which offers advanced first professional degrees. They have a national reputation for excellence and employ thirty full-time faculty with terminal academic and professional degrees. Numerous part-time faculty are also utilized at the college, but were not included in the study to allow for a better understanding of those faculty who long-term interests in the institution and interact with administrators on a regular basis.

Data were collected using the Faculty Involvement in Governance (FIG) survey instrument. The instrument contained ten categorical response questions germane to the current investigation, asking respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with each statement using a Likert-type 1-to-5 scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Strongly Agree). Questions

related to the purpose of the current study included characteristics of an "ideal governance process" and beliefs about current faculty roles in institutional governance.

The FIG survey instrument consistently has obtained internal reliability ratings of .80 or higher in its prior use. Survey instruments were distributed to faculty at the professional education institution in the fall of 1995.

Results

A total of 27 usable survey responses were returned for data analysis, representing a 90 percent response rate. From the response, it was apparent that the faculty were highly interested in the issue of shared governance and were willing to express their perceptions. The selection of a single-purpose institution may appear limiting, however; the high response rate strengthens the value of the data within the context of the case study.

Table 1 presents data related to faculty perceptions of their current involvement in the institutional governance process. From the results, it is apparent that the faculty agreed with four key statements:

1. Assist in clarifying roles of administrators (4.40);
2. Insist on rights and responsibilities related to governance (4.33);
3. Become more involved in budget expenditures (4.18);
4. Express faculty opinions as valuable in decision-making (4.11).

With little doubt, the faculty from this professional institution are highly interested in participating in shared governance with the administration. There appears to be some concern related to those issues which affect all faculty, i.e., budget and decision-making. The notion that faculty wish to assist in clarifying administrators roles may indicate a desire to help, or may indicate some frustration related to current practices. The responses did not verify the assumption, and further investigation into this matter may be necessary. Some indications regarding the emotional aspects of shared governance by the faculty may be expressed in the insistence upon rights and responsibilities, strong words within the educational context.

In spite of the faculty opinions regarding their current involvement in governance processes, there appears to be little tangible support for their participation. Although it is unclear as to the type of rewards which faculty may be seeking (financial vs. non-financial), there is general disagreement that the administration recognizes the current engagement of faculty. Perhaps that is the reason for the neutral response related to "working harder."

From the results presented in Table 2, the faculty are in agreement that processes should be in place which allow adequate faculty input into governance. Of special note is the strong agreement related to involvement early in the decision-making process. Faculty often respond negatively when decisions are

presented to them in an informational context rather than within a framework of collaborative interest. Thus, the ideal of shared governance must be mutually accepted as a "working relationship" rather than an autocratic approach to decision making.

Agreement also exists among the faculty that processes should be in place to question administrative actions. One of those listed in Table 2 is the Faculty Senate. A strong senate allows faculty to be represented in a singular voice, one which often extends beyond the boundaries of the campus. In this particular case, the Faculty Senate President meets regularly with the College President and his cabinet, but is also invited to present faculty issues to the Board of Regents. This interaction provides a valuable conduit for shared governance between various constituencies related to decision making.

Although the faculty at this institution appear relatively neutral to the notion of consultants as mediators, the fact that they may be utilized indicates an openness of the administration to achieve the most agreeable outcomes even when the parties may be diametrically opposed. There is a strong sense of determined resolution of opposing views.

Discussion

Higher education administration and governance is under a great deal of public pressure, from directions of the citizenry, students paying tuition, and state legislators. In the process of defending their roles, responsibilities, and actions, the

concept of participatory management has become more commonplace. Particularly true in private higher education where tuition revenue is the primary source of funding, shared authority as a management tool has become vital to maintaining a positive environment where faculty and administration can thrive. Thus, shared governance can become an important aspect in the fabric of private professional education institutions.

The involvement of faculty in institutional decision-making is one technique or method for potentially demonstrating commitment to quality while simultaneously serving as a conduit for more effective institutional management. The current roles of faculty in the governance process, as indicated by the data, suggest that institutional culture has a great bearing on the availability of involvement. Faculty having to define administrative positions and insist on rights and responsibilities suggested that something of an adversarial relationship does indeed exist within the framework of the institution. This, coupled with the anticipated moderate rating of working harder to cooperate with administrators and the disagreement that there are adequate rewards for participation, reinforces the view of an institutional culture where faculty and administrative functions and roles are clearly divided.

Responding faculty also perceived an ideal governance process as a system where they are involved early in the decision-making process and are empowered to question policy through a formal process. The strong agreement with these

statements indicates a belief pattern by faculty that the process of governance may be as strong as the responsibility for making a final decision. Additionally, professional education faculty strongly believed that their faculty senate should be used as a mechanism for gaining the involvement of other faculty and that administrators should rely on the senate as a means of soliciting faculty participation.

The dimensions of these responses prove especially interesting within the framework of professional education. In a domain where national standards are common, continuing professional education is typically required, and there is little transfer of administrators from alternative disciplines, faculty seemed to believe that there is a potential and desirable mode of shared authority. Additionally, these faculty strongly agreed with little diversity in responses that despite national and state efforts to regulate curriculum content, they are hungry for participation in institutional governance. In an era of increasing work loads with declining resources, these faculty are to be applauded for their desire to be involved and to share in the responsibility for molding their institution's policies.

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Table 1

Current Roles of Faculty Involvement in Governance Processes

Characteristic	Mean	Range	Mode	SD
Faculty should assist in clarifying roles of administrators so that they know they are to administer policy and not impose their own	4.40	2	5	.636
Faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles (such as curriculum, graduation requirements, etc.)	4.33	4	5	1.143
Faculty should be more involved in developing specific outcomes for budgetary expenditures	4.18	3	5	.878
Convince the administration that the faculty "voice" is a valuable component in decision making	4.11	4	4	.933
Faculty committees should work harder to cooperate with administration	3.29	4	3	.912
Faculty members are adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process	2.11	3	3	.933

Table 2

Characteristics of an Ideal Governance Process

Characteristic	Mean	Range	Mode	SD
Institutional procedures involve faculty governance early in the decision making process	4.97	4	5	1.141
Faculty empowered to question policy decisions through a well articulated process	4.33	4	5	1.143
Faculty senate is utilized as a conduit through which faculty participation is solicited	4.22	3	4	.751
Neutral "consultants" are utilized to mediate faculty-administration dealings	3.18	4	4	1.210